

# D.C. Government Child & Family Services Agency

## Dates to Remember for the 2008-2009 School Year for DCPS

Summer School
06/29/08 – 08/05/08
First Day of School
08/25/2008
Parent-Teacher
Conference Days
10/03/2008
12/08/2008
02/27/2009
05/15/2009
Issuance of Report Cards
11/07/2008
01/30/2009
04/09/2009
06/22/2009
Holidays/Vacation Days
09/01/2008
10/13/2008
11/11/2008
11/27-28/2008
12/22/2008-01/02/2009
01/19-20/2009
02/16/2009
03/23-27/2009
04/10-13/2009
04/16/2009
05/25/2009
Last Day of School
06/15/2008

## EDUCATION GUIDE FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

### Improving Educational Outcomes For Children



Educational achievement is a critical component of a child's overall wellbeing. Therefore, all children in care must have strong support systems to address their educational needs in order to ensure success in school.

As a social worker, your role is to ensure that a child's or youth's educational needs are met. This includes planning, monitoring, and maintaining records regarding academic and behavioral performances.

### Placement Changes and Educational Stability

The school setting is often one of the most stabilizing environments for children and youth in out-of-home care. On-going relationships with teachers and peers provide the needed social and emotional support that will help children stay in school.

Children should remain in their current school whenever possible, unless other circumstances prevent it.

Movement between schools should preferably take place at logical breaks in the school year,

such as at the end of a marking period or semester.

Decisions about school placement should be made collaboratively by the social worker, birth parents when possible, the new caregiver and school personnel.

When making placement decisions, the parties involved in making the determination should consider the following:

- The student's academic, social, and emotional needs

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- Safety or other risk factors
- Schedule/Carnegie units concerns for high school students
- Therapeutic services
- Number of previous school placements
- Potential plans for reunification
- Travel distance and length of bus rides, given the child's age, developmental level or special needs

# Social Worker's Role

## Ways Social Workers can support Education Advocacy

As a social worker, your role is to advocate for the best interest of a child's or youth's education. This includes planning, monitoring, and maintaining records regarding academic and behavioral performances.

- Providing children with enrollment continuity by placing them in the same school district whenever possible and, when school change is inevitable enroll child/youth in a new school within 3 days
- Engaging the child/youth in academic planning and education decision making
- Attending school planning, 504 plan, Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings
- Communicating regularly with all parties involved in child's education planning
- Planning for post-secondary education and training with older youth
- Gathering education documentation and maintaining education screens in FACES
- Notifying the school in writing of any changes in the duration or delegation of authority
- When changing placement, making sure the new caregiver has pertinent education documentation, such as the IEP or 504 Plans
- Making sure that children from birth to 4 years of age are referred to an appropriate early learning program

## Caregiver's Role

Caregivers play a key role in the academic success of children in their care. If the social worker determines that the caregiver will serve as the primary person responsible for the child's academic progress, the social worker must prepare the caregiver for that role.

This could include familiarizing caregivers with the education rights of children/youth in foster care, developing a communication plan for sharing information on the child's/youth's educational status, and providing a method or process for monitoring the child's/youth's progress with the caregiver.

Social workers should also include education as a topic at regular meetings with caregivers, and teach caregivers how to understand report cards and attendance records.

### **Ways caregivers can support education:**

- Ensuring the child attends school on a regular basis
- Communicating regularly with the school, teacher, and the social worker
- Participating in school meetings and activities
- Identifying and communicating educational needs that arise in the course of homework or parent-teacher conferences
- Making sure that the social worker receives copies of all school and student information such as grades, transcripts, IEPs, etc.
- Creating an environment that supports education (i.e., regular homework time, reading to younger children, visits to the library, quiet reading time for children/youth of all ages without television)

# Child and Youth's Role

It is important for children and youth in out-of-home care to understand the importance of having a well- thought-out education plan. Children/youth need to be consulted, regarding decisions that will prepare them for a successful future.

Decision making is a learned life skill. If youth have an opportunity to be involved and practice decision making skills early in life, these skills become habits over time. By middle school (grades 6 through 8), youth should be participating in their own education planning.

## **Ways youth may be engaged in their education planning:**

- Monitoring and discussing their academic progress
- Asking the teachers questions when they do not understand assignments
- Attending school regularly and enrolling in the proper classes
- Completing all homework assignments and preparing for tests
- For youth receiving Special Education services, actively participating in their IEP meetings
- Participating in services that will help to make up for lost credits or will provide help for a youth who needs to catch up

## **Ways youth can participate in decision making:**

- Attending all education meetings, including IEPs as developmentally appropriate
- Meeting with guidance staff regularly to discuss future plans.
- Planning for post-secondary education or training, learning about careers and developing interests in community, and volunteer activities
- Choosing extracurricular activities that enhance their overall well-being and positive sense of self



# Building and Maintaining Relationships with the School

Develop a partnership with the school and share relevant information about your child's education and development. This will ensure that the school has the information needed to provide the right kind of education services for your child. **It is critically important that you understand the school's procedures and requirements for enrollment, discipline, performance and graduation.**

School terms can be confusing; therefore, do not hesitate to ask for an explanation if there are any aspects of the programs and/or processes that you do not understand. Remain positive about all relationships by treating all school staff as allies. Assume they are effective collaborative partners in meeting the youth's educational needs. When problems arise, always ask for and listen carefully to the school's perspective on the issue. Avoid getting sidetracked by personal conflicts and instead maintain focus on the youth and/or problem, rather than people. Always discuss issues and make offers or proposals to create "win-win" solutions that may be satisfactory to the child and the school.

## Children with Special Education Needs

Some children experience learning difficulties. These difficulties may be due to one or more physical, mental, and/or learning disorders/disabilities. Children with special needs are usually entitled to receive special services and/or accommodations through the public schools. Federal law mandates that every child receives

a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. These mandates also entitle children with special needs to receive extra services to support their ability to learn in school. Three Federal laws that apply to children with special needs are:

- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (1990)
- The educational services that most children receive through public schools are mandated under IDEA and Section 504

## ❖ Individuals with Disabilities Education Act



Always build up a child by focusing on their strengths.

IDEA revolutionized the way students with disabilities are educated in the United States by ensuring educational equality and eliminating the mis- education and exclusion of students with disabilities. IDEA requires school districts to integrate students with disabilities into regular

education settings. In order to decide if a child qualifies for services under IDEA, a full initial evaluation of the child is conducted by qualified professionals. If children qualify, they are entitled to special education and related services at no cost to their parents. Under IDEA,

**"special education" means a specially designed instruction program that meets the unique needs of a child with a disability.** Each qualified child is entitled to a full description of those services in an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

## ❖ Individual Education Program (IEP)

All children who qualify for special education must have access to the same general curriculum as non– special education students, in order for the child to meet the same educational standards that apply to all children in the school district.

**An IEP is the document that determines the actions the school will take to meet the child's individual educational needs. School districts are required to follow specific procedures to determine a child's eligibility for special education, and to develop the child's IEP, as well as to resolve conflicts.**

Parents of children with disabilities must be afforded a meaningful opportunity to participate in the development of their child's IEP.

### IEP Team

- ✚ **The IEP Team is made up of people who can help design the student's education program including parent/surrogate parent, teachers, school psychologist, social workers and other staff who provide services to the student.**
- ✚ The student should be part of the IEP team when he/she is old enough to understand the process. The student and the parent can invite outside people to join the team.

In order for any child to receive special educational services they must go through this process.

### IEP Meeting

- ✚ The first meeting should occur within 30 days of completion of evaluation.
- ✚ IEP review meetings are held once a year or upon parent/surrogate parent request.
- ✚ Decisions will be made about the student's placement and how services will be delivered.
- ✚ The finished IEP should describe what the student needs, what the school will provide and the anticipated outcomes.

### IEP Includes:

- ✚ The student's current levels of educational performance.
- ✚ Specific education goals for both general & special educational classes.
- ✚ Documentation of how progress will be measured & reported.
- ✚ Descriptions of all of the services, assistive technology, accommodations & modifications to be provided & dates when services will begin.
- ✚ Any modification the student will have for taking state/district achievement tests.





## ❖ Preparing for a Successful IEP

Once it has been determined that a child has a disability and needs individually designed instruction, a meeting is held to put into writing a description of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) the student will receive. This meeting is an opportunity for social worker, parents and school staff to share information, collaborate and plan how the student's needs will be met. IEP meetings must be held at least once a year, but can be held more often at the parent or school's request.

### ***Preparation Before the IEP Meeting***

**Visit child's classroom:** Make an appointment to observe the child in class.

**Review Child's Records:** **Schools keep a cumulative file on all students that contains information such as: report cards, test scores, assessment scores, and other communications the school provides regarding your child's performance.** It is very important that you request to review this information prior to an IEP meeting. *If the child has recently received an individual evaluation by a school psychologist, request that a copy of the report be sent to you at least one week prior to the meeting.*

**Ask who will be attending the child's IEP Meeting:** Whenever possible get a written list of the people the school plans to have at the meeting and you should tell your school contact person if you plan to bring others to the meeting as well. Also you should ask about the expected purpose of the meeting. For example, ***If the child is 14 years of age or older, one of the purposes of the meeting should be transition planning, and he or she must be invited to the meeting.***

**Negotiate the time of the meeting:** Both you and the school should cooperate to set the meeting at a time that is convenient for as many people as possible. Also discuss how long the meeting is scheduled to last. You need to feel comfortable that enough time is allotted for the meeting so that you do not feel rushed.

**Ask for a copy and review the parent rights booklet :** The school distributes copies of a booklet describing the parents' rights. If you cannot locate the booklet, be sure to request another copy and review it before the meeting.

### ***Developing a Plan for the Meeting***

**Talk to the child:** The child is the most important resource in determining what services would be appropriate to support their educational needs. Ask the child what is going well in school and what s/he would like to do better. As the child approaches adolescence, discuss academic and vocational interests, possible career choices, education or training beyond high school. This information will be helpful during the annual review to ensure that the IEP goals are in line with the child's/youth's future goals.

**Prepare a list of the child's strengths and weaknesses:** When preparing your list remain focused on the child's strengths and interests. Include such items as: hobbies, behavior at home, relationship with family and friends, and difficulties or strengths you may have noticed.

**Develop your ideal IEP for the child:** It is a good idea for you to put together a clearly expressed blueprint of the educational program and services you think will be most beneficial for the child/youth beforehand. Also think about what skills you

would like the child to develop? What behaviors would you like to see improved? Has the child had a behavioral assessment and does he/she need a behavioral plan? What are your main concerns for your child right now? If the child is in middle school or entering high school, what are his/her career/transition interests and goals? Be prepared to ask questions about the amount of time the child will need to spend in special education in order to meet these goals. Where will the special education services be delivered to the child—regular classroom, separate special education classroom, and/or small group, etc.? Ask if the child has had an evaluation for assistive technology and if assistive technology would benefit your child. Be prepared to discuss whether the child needs after school or summer tutoring.

**Decide how often you need progress reports:** The school must give you a progress report each time a report card is issued. However, if you feel that receiving progress reports more frequently would be helpful in adequately evaluation the child's/youth progress; then, determine what is necessary in order for you to feel that you are adequately informed to support the school and your child.

**Be organized:** Organize your materials prior to the meeting so that you can find information easily. Write down your questions and suggestions and practice your comments prior to the meeting.

### ***What to do During the Meeting***

**Follow the plan you developed:** Systematically go through every question, concern or comment you included in the plan you developed.

**Keep a positive attitude:** Be positive and assertive but not antagonistic. Thank the participants. Be sure to get a copy of the IEP to take home with you. It is okay to say you need to take some time to review the IEP at home before you decide whether you agree.

**Reschedule if necessary:** If it appears that the members of the team cannot reach agreement, or if you need time to consider recommendations, ask for the meeting to be continued at a later date.

## **Decision Making with Youth in Special Education**

Making informed choices and decisions for children with special educational needs is one of the most important competencies. This is especially for children who have learning disabilities because they face very unique barriers.

Often, children with learning disabilities face difficulties with organizational and planning abilities, decision making, and motivation. Without

these fundamental skills some children lack the ability to make effective behavioral and academic choices.

Learning disabilities are generally hidden disabilities, and because in our culture having a disability is often viewed as stigmatizing, many children do not acknowledge that they are having problems in school or that they have learning disabilities. As a

social worker it is important that you are monitoring a child's academic progress and teaming with schools to create educational plans. Likewise, it is equally important to talk to a child about their education.

## ❖ Section 504 Under IDEA

**Section 504 ensures that children with disabilities have equal access to an education.** All public schools and many independent schools receive federal funds and are required to follow Section 504 guidelines. To qualify for services under Section 504, a child must have a disability that substantially limits one or more major life activities, or must be regarded as having a disability. Major life activities include: self-care, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working.

As defined under Section 504, disability is a physical or mental impairment that includes, but is not limited to: “learning impairments; emotional/psychiatric disabilities; learning disabilities; attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity; severe allergies, chronic asthma, or health impairment; cosmetic disfigurement or amputation; injuries or broken bones; communicable diseases; drug addiction (unless individuals are current users, not in rehabilitation programs); and alcohol addiction (does not exclude current users)”.

Students that qualify for services and accommodations must have equal access to all academic and non-academic activities and programs. In addition, schools are required to provide related services and accommodations to qualified students with disabilities, regardless of eligibility for special education. However, schools are not required to provide an individualized educational program (IEP) that is designed to meet the child’s unique needs and provides the child with educational benefit.

### ***How does the Section 504 process work in schools?***

Check with your school to find out what to do. Talk to the principal, guidance counselor, special educator, or teacher to learn how the process works and how to make a referral for Section 504 services. The 504 team will gather information to determine your child’s eligibility. The team will develop a plan with you to accommodate your child’s educational needs. Every three years the plan will be re-evaluated.

## Educational Surrogate Parents

Many rights under IDEA can only be asserted by the child’s or youth’s parent. However, due to the unique circumstances that are associated with children and youth in care, **IDEA grants authority to an “educational surrogate parent”**. The educational surrogate parent takes on the role as the “parent” for children whose parents are not available. The state education agency, most likely your school or school district, will appoint a surrogate parent, although the court also has the power to appoint surrogate parents as well. A person appointed as a surrogate parent can not be an employee of the state education agency nor any agency involved in the care of the child or youth. In addition, the surrogate must have knowledge and skills that ensures adequate representation for the child.



# Discipline and Special Education

## **Students receiving special education and/or 504 services are entitled to additional protections around discipline.**

If a behavior that triggers a long term suspension or an expulsion is related to the student's disability, the student cannot be disciplined. In these situations, the school must convene a Manifestation Determination Meeting within 10 school days of the date of removal. The IEP team and school administration make up this meeting.

They must answer the following question: Did the student's disability have something to do with the behavior in question?

Furthermore, if a student receives a pattern of short term suspensions that add up to 10 days, a Manifestation Determination Meeting must be held to address whether or not the IEP/504 Plan is sufficient, whether additional services are needed, or if the school placement needs to change.

## Dispute Resolution

It can be challenging to ensure that the rights of children and youth with special educational needs are met. At times you may find yourself disagreeing with the school or school district.

Disagreements can range from a variety of issues such as eligibility, evaluations, services, and/or placement. If you ever find yourself in a disagreement, first try to resolve the problem with the IEP team or school. However, if that does not work there are several methods to resolve the issue: formal complaint procedures; mediation; and due process hearing.

**Complaint procedures:** Every state education agency must have a compliant process that can be initiated by anyone. Complaints must be: 1) Addressed to the State Education Department; 2) State facts of the violation; 3) Name, address of person making complain; and 4) name, address of local school district. It is important that you keep a copy of the complaint and document when it was sent. The state agency will acknowledge receipt and provide written notice whether an investigation of the allegations is warranted.

**Mediation:** Under IDEA, states are required to provide free mediation services to parents for the purpose of resolving conflicts about students' special education programs. In this process, a neutral third party is brought in to sit down with both parties and try to come to an acceptable agreement. This process is voluntary and any agreement that is made must be carried out by the parties.

**Due process hearing:** This is a formal administrative proceeding, much like a trial. At the hearing parent/surrogate parents and the school district are able to present evidence and witnesses. A hearing officer makes a written decision based on the facts and the law. Parents/surrogate parents may be represented by either a lawyer or someone knowledgeable about special education requirements. Federal law also requires that the school district generally must pay reasonable attorney fees incurred, if a parent/surrogate parent prevails in the trial.

*For additional information about DC Public School's dispute resolution process please contact::*

*Student Hearing Office; Van Ness Elementary School; 1150 5th Street, S.E.; Washington, D.C. 20002*

*(202) 442-5432*

# **District of Columbia's High School Graduation Requirements**

Every DCPS student must complete **23.5** Carnegie Units successfully in order to graduate, regardless of the program in which s/he is enrolled. One Carnegie Unit equals two semesters of study in a particular subject. Students must also complete **100** hours of community service as a graduation requirement. Currently students have two options for completing the graduation community service requirement. They may complete it through community service or service learning.

*Community Service:* Community Service is the process of providing a direct service to the community in addressing a specific need. It is not connected to classroom curriculum and is not completed during academic learning time.

*Service Learning:* Service-learning is a teaching strategy that links student community service to classroom instruction. It is a method by which youth learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences that meet real community needs. The program is designed to help students foster a sense of civic responsibility and caring for others, and provide students with skills for real-life situations. It is usually generated in the classroom and can be performed during academic learning time.

Students may begin their service at any age; however, there are designated Community Service Liaisons at the senior high school level only. Documented and verifiable hours can be placed in the student's cumulative record along with grade reports each year. For additional information, please visit the following website: <http://www.k12.dc.us/Dcps/curriculum/comserve1.html>

Course	Carnegie Unit
Art	0.5
Career/Vocational Education	1.0
D.C. Government & History	0.5
English	4.0
Foreign Language	2.0
Health and Physical Education	1.5
Mathematics(including 1 year of Algebra/its equivalent	3.0
Music	0.5
Science ( including 1 year of laboratory science)	3.0
U.S. Government	0.5
U.S. History	1.0
World Geography	0.5
World History	1.0
Electives	4.5
100 Hours of Community Service	0.0
<b>Total Carnegie Units</b>	<b>23.5</b>

*\* The health and physical education requirement (1.5 Carnegie units) is waived for students receiving an evening high school diploma.*

*\*\* Banneker Senior High School and Duke Ellington School of the Arts students must earn 26.0 Carnegie units.*

# Prince George's County's High School Graduation Requirements

To be awarded a diploma from Maryland's public school system, a student must be enrolled and earn a minimum of **21** credits that include the following listed below. In addition, every student is required to do **36 hours** of independent service through school activities or volunteering in a non-profit agency or a for-profit hospital, nursing home, or licensed day care center.

Service-learning is a teaching method that combines meaningful service to the community with curriculum-based learning. Students improve their academic skills by applying what they learn in school to the real world; they then reflect on their experience to reinforce the link between their service and their learning. The combination of service-learning infused into the curriculum and the independent service is roughly equivalent to 75 hours. Prince George's county offers a service-learning class for credit, a science mentoring class in eight high schools, and an independent study course in service-learning. For additional information, please visit the following website:

[http://www1.pgcps.org/student-services/ssl.aspx?ekmsel=c580fa7b\\_1940\\_0\\_btlink](http://www1.pgcps.org/student-services/ssl.aspx?ekmsel=c580fa7b_1940_0_btlink)

Course	Specific Requirements	Credits	High School Assessment	NCLB Testing
English		4	Students must take the Maryland High School Assessments for English, algebra/data analysis, biology and government.	Students must take the Maryland School Assessment for geometry.
Mathematics	1 Algebra; 1Geometry; 1 Additional Mathematics	3		
Science	1 Biology; 2 additional credits that must include laboratory experience in any or all of the following areas: earth, life, or physical science	3		
Social Studies	1 US History; 1 Local, Sate, National Government; 1 in World History	3		
Course	Other Requirements	Credits		
Fine Arts		1		
Physical Education		0.5		
Health		0.5		
Technology Education		1		
Completer and Electives	2 credits of the same foreign language and 3 electives; 2 credits of advanced t technology education and 3 credits in electives; or complete a state-approved career and technology program and any remaining credits in electives	5		
Total Credit Required		21		

# Resources

## **District of Columbia Public Schools:**

<http://www.k12.dc.us/>

\* General Information: 202-727-1000

\* Special Education: 202-442-4800

\* Student Support Services: 202-442-5099

## **Child and Family Services Agency Education Unit**

\* Tyrone Bradshaw: 202-727-7037 \* Paula Langford: 202-727-4652

## **National Center for Learning Disabilities:**

<http://www.ncld.org/content/iew/902/456086/>

## **National Association of Parents with Children in Special Education (NAPCSE):**

<http://napcse.org/specialeducationlaw/dea2004.php>

**LD Online:** <http://www.ldonline.org/>

## **Internet Special Education Resources:**

<http://www.iser.com/>

## **U. S. Department of Education– Parents**

<http://www.ed.gov/parents/landing.jhtml>

## **Parents United for the DC Public Schools:**

<http://www.parentsunited4dc.org/>

**Wrightslaw:** <http://www.wrightslaw.com>

## **Center for Law and Education**

<http://www.cleweb.org/>

## **Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates**

<http://www.copaa.net/>

**Learning Disability Association of America (LDA):** <http://www.ldanatl.org/>

## **LDA D.C. Office Information:**

**Connie Bumbaugh**

**P.O. Box 73275**

**Washington, DC 20056**

**(202) 387-1772**

**e-mail:** [LDAofDC@gmail.com](mailto:LDAofDC@gmail.com)

## **Schwab Foundation for Learning**

<http://www.schwablearning.org/Articles.asp?r=257>

## **Child Welfare League of America**

[www.cwla.org/publications](http://www.cwla.org/publications)